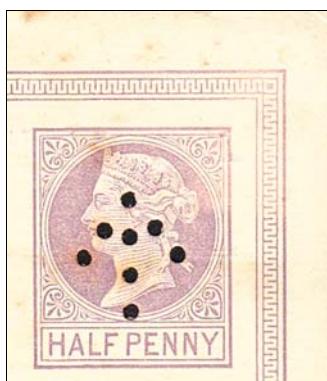


REPAIR OF SLOPER EXPERIMENTAL ARROW CANCEL

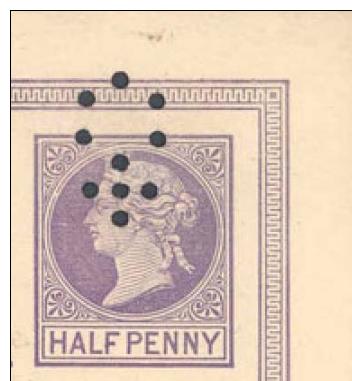
Maurice Harp

The introduction of postcards on the 1st October 1870 brought chaos to the Post Office. They had completely underestimated how popular post cards would be. On the first day half a million cards went through the London G.P.O and 75 million cards were used in the first year throughout the country. In the early days there were just too many cards for the Post Office to cancel and many 1d lilac postcards can be found without any cancellation.

To get over the problem the Post Office turned to Sloper to see if he could provide a machine that could cancel a number of post cards in one go. He provided the London office with two punches, one of which punched an ARROW and the other an ORB and CROSS.

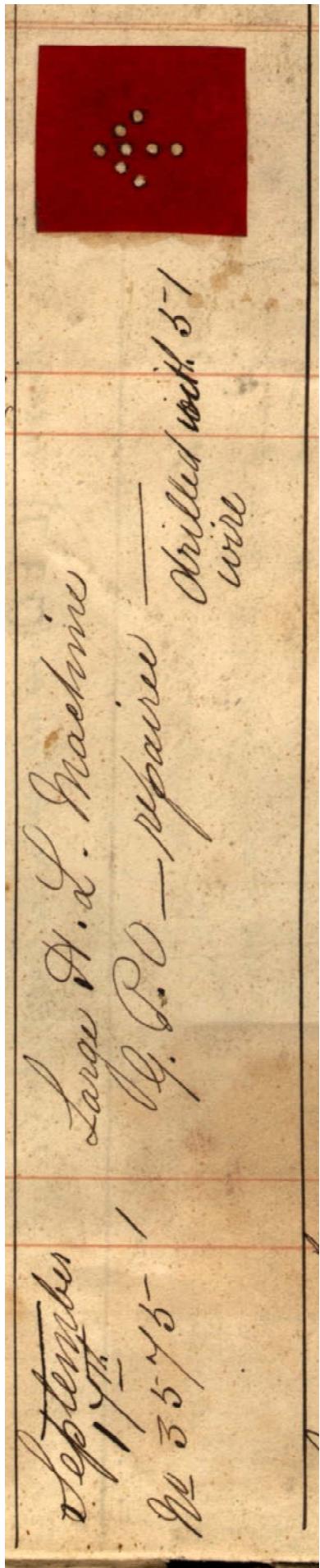


London Arrow
Earliest Use 27-10-1870



London Orb & Cross
Earliest Use 10-11-1870

Following the initial experiment the Post office issued a minute endorsed *"Approved 5th June 1871"* which ordered a further four machines - *"three for the circulation department and one for the Liverpool office."* The ORB and CROSS cancel had disappeared by early 1872 but the ARROW cancels were used for much longer. The Liverpool ARROW is recorded being used up to January 1875 and the London cancel until August 1873. In general the Liverpool office appears to have made use of the ARROW cancel more than the London office. These ARROW cancellations were probably only used at times when there were just too many post cards to be cancelled using the conventional means.



We have no record in the Society records that Sloper was the manufacturer of these machines but we do have a record for the repair by Sloper of one of the arrow machines. The entry is for a repair to a die on September 17th 1873 - No. 3575. The entry refers to the machine being a "*Large H(orizontal) L(ever) Machine - G.P.O. repaired - drilled with 51 wire*". 51 wire (BWG) is equivalent to 1.7018 mm.

Perforating a large block of post cards obviously put extreme stress on the perforating pins and broken pins are seen in the Liverpool cancels but have never been reported on the London machines. Study of these broken pins reveal that Liverpool probably had at least four perforating machines.

The report of the repair in 1873 raises a number of questions. The latest recorded use of the London ARROW is August 1873. So if this was a repair to a London machine it would appear to have been money wasted by the Post Office, as the repaired machine was never used.

If it was a repair to a Liverpool ARROW machine it still doesn't make much sense. The Liverpool machine showed no sign of breakage in its first two years of use. A break appeared at the end of 1872 which was quickly repaired and during 1873 there were no breaks recorded. So why would a repair to a Liverpool machine be carried out in September 1873? The Liverpool ARROW machine though did suffer multiple pin breaks starting in March 1874 so any repair made can't have been very effective.